

will receive a considerable sum for the exchange. I have no doubt what he does is for the best."

"But the line is an inferior service, is it not, Aunt Anne?"

"It is thought far less of, certainly. It is a sad thing for my poor boy, a complete blight of all his prospects. I am glad he was never in love, for he can now never marry."

Elsie started so visibly as to interrupt her aunt, but perceiving she had not been observed she transformed the start into a shiver, and, complaining of the cold, crept nearer the fire.

"I am sure I find the room warm enough, my dear," said Anne; "and your face is quite flushed; but how cold your hands are! you must be ill. Lie down on the sofa while I get you something warm to drink."

And Mrs. Lawrence, alarmed out of her own sad thoughts by her niece's flushed cheeks and cold hands, disposed Elsie on the sofa under a thick shawl, and hurried off in quest of her panacea for a cold. Elsie swallowed the mixture of port wine and ginger which in a short time made its appearance, pleaded a sudden chill, and begged to be allowed to go to sleep, glad of an excuse to be left in quiet to her own thoughts.

Her mind was in a whirl. She understood now what had puzzled her for the last three weeks; she saw clearly the reason of the conduct that had appeared to her so strange. Her cousin's words had been but few, but Elsie knew as well that he had intended them as a serious declaration of love as though he had indulged in lover's raptures for an hour. Often had she wondered that he had found or made no opportunity of renewing the conversation so inopportunistically interrupted; but the reason was plain now, he had purposely avoided it; he had left her so suddenly to prevent the chance of their being thrown together. He could not marry, therefore he must not speak of love.

She did not know whether the discovery most pleased or pained her. Perhaps she had not actually doubted John's affection; she loved him, and therefore believed doubly in his love for her. But still it was satisfactory to know that conduct which

had seemed so like caprice or trifling was nothing of the kind, but grounded on firm and honorable motives to which Elsie's own heart fully responded. This was the bright side; the dark one, and it was very dark, was that she did not see how the obstacle was to be removed. John had left her; was not likely to return; and even if he did, it was not probable that what had seemed right and fitting to him at one time would not be so at another. He could say no more to her; he had been interrupted just in time. The few words he had uttered that evening, being, as they were, unsucceeded by any further declaration, Elsie could not appear to take at their full meaning, however well she had understood them. Her clear mind saw all this without disguise. A less straightforward nature might have hesitated to define such thoughts so clearly, but Elsie did not attempt to conceal from herself, however she might conceal from others, that she loved her cousin, and should endeavor as far as her efforts could avail to remove the impediments that might lie in the way of their union. Any certainty was to Elsie preferable to ignorance or suspense; and having once come to a settled conclusion, and arranged her plans for the future, her mind was at rest. When Mrs. Lawrence came a short time after to enquire how she was, she found Elsie fast asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

The winter wore away and brought little change. For the greater part of it Mrs. Lawrence remained at Donningdean; her niece could not bear to part with her, even to go to Charlote, and so it was settled that she should continue Elsie's guest until her own home in London could be prepared for her reception. They were to live in London for Challie's sake; he must pursue his reading in earnest now, as on his success hereafter in his profession his livelihood would depend, and his mother could not bear the idea of his doing so away from her. She never said, though they all knew, how she must dread the exchange from her old commodious and luxurious home, and pure country air, to a small close dwelling